



Kimberly A. Foster  
Executive Director

# LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**COMMISSIONERS:**  
CAROL O. BIONDI  
PATRICIA CURRY  
ANN FRANZEN  
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HELEN A. KLEINBERG, CHAIR  
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REV. CECIL L. MURRAY  
SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR  
STACEY SAVELLE  
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR  
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS  
TRULA J. WORTHY-CLAYTON

## APPROVED MINUTES

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The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **August 20, 2007**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

### COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Ann Franzen  
Helen A. Kleinberg  
Rev. Cecil L. Murray  
Stacey Savelle  
Adelina Sorkin  
Trula J. Worthy-Clayton  
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

### COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Carol O. Biondi  
Patricia Curry  
Susan F. Friedman  
Dr. La-Doris McClaney  
Sandra Rudnick

### APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda for the August 20, 2007, meeting was unanimously approved as amended.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the August 2, 2007, general meeting were unanimously approved.

### CHAIR'S REPORT

- Chair Kleinberg reminded Commissioners that the first Monday in September falls on the Labor Day holiday, and that the Commission voted previously to cancel its regular meeting on that date and hold a special meeting on Tuesday, September 4, 2007.

- Commissioners unanimously approved the cancellation of the Commission's normal meeting on November 19, 2007. They then unanimously approved the calling of a special meeting for the annual Commission retreat on that day.
- Representatives from the Chief Executive Office will present the county's 2007–2008 children and families budget in January.
- A part-time University of Southern California master's student will be available soon to work with the Commission as an intern. Details will be worked out through the Executive Office, which handles Commission staffing, and should not interfere with other plans to involve youth in Commission efforts.
- Work has begun on the Commission's annual report, and Commissioners will be asked for their input in the next few weeks. Chair Kleinberg hopes the first draft will be ready in early September, with a finished product by the beginning of October.
- The Board of Supervisors has given the Economy and Efficiency Commission the responsibility of assessing the county's new cluster-type internal governance structure, and the Commission's letters to the Board and to the Chief Executive Office regarding the children and families cluster have been forwarded to that body.
- Six candidates for the senior deputy director position at the Department of Children and Family Services will be interviewed over the next three days, and Chair Kleinberg will participate on that panel. All candidates are from outside the county, and the majority are from out of state.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Department of Children and Family Services director Trish Ploehn updated Commissioners on several issues.

- The revised settlement plan for the Katie A. lawsuit was accepted in concept by the Board of Supervisors three weeks ago, and DCFS was instructed to proceed with the plan's few no-cost initiatives. The Chief Executive Office was asked to report back on funding options for the plan's \$86.8 million price tag, \$33 million of which is net county cost not covered by state or Federal funding, nor by EPSDT (Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment) draw-downs. That report is due tomorrow.

In 2002–03, the Board approved an original plan that strove to meet the settlement agreement with a lesser involvement of money and staffing, but the court found those efforts ineffective. Even now, the Katie A. oversight panel finds the revised plan a good first step, but disagrees with DCFS that it is sufficient to meet the mandates of the court. The plan and its funding issues appear as a discussion item on tomorrow's Board agenda, and also as a closed-door item after the regular meeting.

Although it is not a requirement of the lawsuit, the expensive multidisciplinary assessment team (MAT) process is included as part of the revised corrective action

plan. It is being piloted in eight DCFS offices, and management believes it supports the suit's mandates and is extremely worthwhile, enabling families to receive needed services and exit the system, intact, more rapidly. Unfortunately, the state sees no empirical evidence that the MAT process is successful, and cannot be persuaded that this type of comprehensive assessment should be covered under EPSDT. As continued implementation feeds into the research, Ms. Ploehn hopes in time to be able to go to the state with proof of the approach's validity. (Despite the court's order to participate in discussions, the state has never taken part in talks nor settled its part of the Katie A. lawsuit, maintaining that it is not a party to the action.)

- With regard to the prevention initiative's Request for Information, DCFS's report to the Board of Supervisors will be heard on September 25, with a projected start date for the program of October 1. Names of participating agencies will be made public upon the Board's authorization of contracts.

The \$5 million for this year-long program was a one-time allocation from the DCFS family preservation budget in 2005; half will be used for primary prevention, 30 percent for secondary prevention, and 20 percent for tertiary prevention. Recognizing that the prevention of child abuse and neglect is a job that extends far beyond DCFS, the Board of Supervisors has authorized a parallel countywide effort, led by the Chief Executive Office, that also involves the county's other human services agencies. That effort—Healthier Communities, Stronger Families, Thriving Children, or HST—is seeking an additional \$8.6 million in funding over five years. Vice Chair Sorkin suggested rethinking the use of existing Federal Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act funding streams, such as family support or family preservation, to supply this money, and Angela Carter said that is precisely what's being done. One recurring education conference in the South Bay, funded through family support dollars, has been a significant basis for community organizing with parents and families, and has spurred a partnership with Conoco Oil to train residents for high-paying local jobs.

Chair Kleinberg recommended further discussions about prevention strategies, involving additional partners, searching out funding streams, and accessing Mental Health Services Act dollars.

- For the past six and a half years, the Community College Foundation has been contracted to provide the Kinship Education, Preparation & Support (KEPS) trainings for caregivers, and Angela Carter expressed appreciation to that organization for its work. The largest annual number of relatives graduating from this voluntary program has been 350, although approximately 9,000 relatives are part of the system and relatives are historically one of DCFS's most important resources. Changes in the KEPS contract now offer incentives to providers to raise the numbers of relatives completing classes and exhibiting increased knowledge. Contracts were recently awarded to two new training providers, Hamburger Homes/Aviva for SPAs 3 and 4 and Crystal Stairs for all other SPAs, and meetings with them are now taking place so that classes can begin in early September.

Confidentiality remains a stumbling-block for KEPS providers, since they cannot legally receive lists of caregivers to recruit for classes, but Ms. Carter said that the department is working with County Counsel to resolve that issue. A backup strategy might be for kinship workers doing home assessments to obtain written consent for relatives to be contacted by KEPS providers, or for kin attending the required orientation sessions conducted at community colleges (public entities exempt from confidentiality strictures) to give permission for their names to be passed on to KEPS providers so they may continue with the voluntary portion of their training.

No new KEPS classes have yet been scheduled, and venues depend on where participants live and on the availability of the licensed child care required by county rules. Child care, though essential for relatives' attendance, is not included in the KEPS provider contract. Chair Kleinberg suggested that classes be held in existing child care facilities that have the proper equipment and might supply appropriate staff. If most children of relatives attending KEPS classes are age five and under, coordination with First 5 LA's child care providers could also be possible. Ms. Carter will look into that, and Commissioner Williams will explore the option with First 5.

Ms. Carter was asked to report back in January on the KEPS training process, including the child care piece.

- Following the June 16 recruitment fair in Hawthorne, 15 Spanish-speaking applicants for children's social worker trainee positions are scheduled to take their written tests on October 5. One has already passed the test, and an interview is scheduled for August 25. Interviews for 13 Spanish-speaking case aides are planned for September 15. Overall, a total of 40-plus applicants were recruited at the event.

Statistics gathered some years ago indicated that a little over half of DCFS families were of Hispanic origin, and though most of those children were English-proficient, at least 30 percent of the parents spoke only Spanish. Recruitment of a multi-lingual staff is critical, since interpreters are generally not used. Commissioners asked for a breakdown of the language preferences chosen by families at first contact, how those relate to overall caseloads, and how they match up with languages spoken by staff.

- Copies of the Auditor-Controller's report on DCFS's procurement section, Ms. Ploehn's response to that report, and her message to DCFS staff regarding the contents of the audit were included in Commission packets. Ms. Ploehn and her deputy, Susan Kerr, requested the review soon after they assumed their current positions, but had not expected such widespread deficiencies. Procurement practices in the 18 regional offices are still being examined, and management has worked closely with the auditors over the past few months to make staffing changes and institute practices that the department can be proud of, including a standardized inventory system; the last full inventory was performed over three years ago.

Commissioners discussed possible reasons for the problems discovered—which tend to be countywide, not just confined to DCFS—including the rush to spend allocated

dollars at the end of a fiscal year, faulty budget and buying projections, lengthy contract preparation periods that allow only a short time for specific program monies to be spent, and staff with little experience or training in fiscal or procurement duties. Commissioner Williams suggested asking the Chief Executive Office to look at a system of reserve funds into which departments can move money after fiscal year-end, and Ms. Ploehn said spending would now be monitored on a monthly basis so budgets can be adjusted. Ms. Ploehn was commended on her message to staff, which she said had received position responses from employees striving to do their best.

- At the Commission's last meeting, Service Employees International Union representative Danny Ramos mentioned a computer program developed by an SEIU member, a former foster youth now working as a CSW at the command post, that can match children with permanent homes on a national level. She has reportedly worked with state and Federal authorities to resolve issues, and offered DCFS the use of the program in 2003. Without obtaining the underlying code, however, the department would not adopt its use. Mr. Ramos sees the program as a major workload relief, and requested the Commission's help to ask the department to reconsider.

Leo Yu from DCFS's information technology section explained the Federal and state regulations the department must follow with regard to any electronic system. Under the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS) Act, the Federal government will fund a statewide system that supports child welfare—in California, the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS)—but anything counties do must be part of that statewide system; they may not act individually nor create their own software. Approval from state and Federal governments must even be obtained before DCFS may purchase additional personal computers. New products are constantly available, including shareware, freeware, and a good adoption and matching system used in Texas, but the approval process is lengthy; also, under SACWIS regulations, the state must purchase and implement any program statewide. At present, the state is doing nothing to enhance the current CWS/CMS system—which took 20 years to introduce—but is instead designing a new one.

Although the Commission is not in a position to recommend individual programs, it wants to do everything possible to implement the best options for children and families. Los Angeles County is on the leading edge of the statewide system, Mr. Yu said, and he requested more documentation of the program mentioned by Mr. Ramos. Chair Kleinberg recommended another discussion to gain a better understanding of what exists with regard to family-matching software, including the Texas model.

## **RETREAT COMMITTEE REPORT**

The annual Commission retreat will take place on November 19 at the California Endowment Center for Healthy Communities. Vice Chair Sorkin and Commissioners Worthy-Clayton, Savelle, Williams, and Franzen are developing the day's program.

### **RELATIVE CAREGIVER COMMITTEE REPORT**

As a result of the reorganization within DCFS's kinship division, the relative care round-table has been on hiatus for some time, but will meet again on October 23 at St. Anne's. The participation of individuals and agencies who work with kin is very valuable, and Commissioner Williams asked representatives to provide names to the Commission office so that information on the meeting can be sent.

### **CASEY FAMILY PROGRAMS STRATEGIC PLAN**

Yakiciwey Washington, senior director at the Los Angeles field office of Casey Family Programs, reviewed the continuum of care offered by the various Casey foundations, which includes emphases on poverty, child protective services, foster care placement, reunification and adoption, and transitions to adulthood.

Casey Family Programs, one of the few private operating foundations in the nation, has been providing comprehensive foster care services for 41 years through eight field offices, mostly in the West, that directly serve 15,000 youth each year. Its ninth office—founded about five years ago in Los Angeles, where over 70 foster family agencies already existed—focuses on services for transition-age youth through an alumni support center in Pasadena, and for relative caregivers through a South Los Angeles kinship support center operated with the Community Coalition, plus case management services and other supports for relatives both in and out of the formal child welfare system. Casey Family Services, which introduced the Family to Family program as part of the team decision-making initiative, is an operating arm of the Annie E. Casey Foundation that performs work similar to that of Casey Family Programs, primarily on the East Coast.

Casey Family Programs' vision for the year 2020 has two components:

- Safely reducing by 50 percent the U.S. foster care population—now over 500,000 children and youth, with about 150 an hour entering the system—and reinvesting the subsequent savings to strengthen child welfare
- Through efforts in education, employment, and mental health, improving the path to self-sufficiency for children who enter the foster care system

Strategic partnerships will be necessary to reach these goals, and a two-day meeting in April brought together teams from Los Angeles, San Diego, Alameda, and Sacramento counties to develop a plan. A further one-day session will occur in November, when counties will share strengths and challenges.

Also discussed in April and subsequently was how Casey Family Programs might support Los Angeles County's Title IV-E waiver efforts. A memorandum of understanding has been approved that focuses on maximizing benefits using existing bodies and funding streams such as the Interagency Operations Group, Champs (short for 'champions,' high-level managers from DCFS, Probation, Mental Health, Public Health, and Health Services), the Katie A. corrective action plan, and the Mental Health Services Act.

The Casey Family Programs systems improvement section is headed by former DCFS director David Sanders and is stressing neighborhood-based prevention. A senior director in California is working on integrating policies on behalf of children statewide, and Jackie Contreras, who appeared before the Commission earlier this month, is also assisting in Casey efforts.

In Friday's *Los Angeles Times*, state superintendent of public instruction Jack O'Connell expressed concerns about disparities in African-American and Latino children's educational achievement, and David Brewer, Los Angeles Unified School District superintendent, said that children start getting into educational trouble at about the fourth grade, and that a child's repetition of the second grade was an almost automatic predictor of that child's failure to graduate from high school. Given that reality, Vice Chair Sorkin questioned the Casey Family Programs' emphasis on transition-age youth. In general, Ms. Washington said, Casey Family Programs targets age 11 to 25 because younger children tend to be easier to place; as adolescence nears, permanent options for young people become more difficult to find. Casey's Los Angeles transition-age youth programs target young people age 14 to 25, although its kinship efforts serve children from birth to age 25 and their families, using education specialists for assessments, advocacy, and training. The Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council, which also receives support from Casey Family Programs, focuses on children from birth to age 24, believing strongly that support for youngsters before age three has the most impact.

Chair Kleinberg expressed concerns that the current team decision-making model does not include education, and Ms. Washington said that the Annie E. Casey Foundation has been approached by those who would like to shift the standardized model to consider that area. Another endorsed practice is family group decision-making, a far more intensive approach that invites everyone important in the life of a child, including educators, to conferences that can take up to 40 staff hours to arrange. That process is intended to shift responsibility for case outcomes to the family, but is not one that can be done at prescribed times in the life of the case (as team decision-making is), but only when appropriate and when the family is willing to fully engage. Casey Family Programs makes training on that model available to county partners and departmental staff, and participates with DCFS on the family group decision-making work group. It is not an approach that is suitable for every case, but every child needs an education; Chair Kleinberg urged the inclusion of education in all case planning conferences.

#### **CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY**

Vani Kumar Dandillaya from the Chief Executive Office presented results from the customer satisfaction survey conducted last October through 15 county departments. The survey instrument, printed in English and in Spanish, was developed in 2002 by the New Directions Task Force (top managers of county health and human service departments) and revised in 2005, with all departments invited to participate in its administration in 2006. It assessed aspects of personal service delivery, service access, and service environment, with further questions about the respondent's history with county services and

average wait times, plus optional questions about gender, age, ethnicity, and use of the county's website.

Approximately 11,000 surveys were left on counters at 116 sites across all SPAs, and over 7,000 customers completed them, for a response rate of about 66 percent. The majority were submitted at the higher-volume health and social services offices, with just over a quarter being completed at parks and recreation facilities, libraries, and general government offices. Overall, approximately 91 percent of the customers who responded were satisfied with services, though significant differences in satisfaction existed across different demographic groups. Priority areas for improvement relate to problem resolution—receiving needed information and being referred to staff who can help—and to service access, as evidenced by staff's clear explanations of procedures. The full report is available on the Chief Executive Office's Service Integration Branch website.

Vice Chair Sorkin questioned the hurdles to service delivery not addressed by the survey: clients who must get in line at 6:00 a.m. at the El Monte Comprehensive Health Center to have even a chance of being one of the 75 patients who can be seen that day, Department of Public Social Services workers who can be reached by phone only during a two-hour slot on weekday mornings, or constant transfers of cases between social workers. Also unknown are the numbers of clients who did not attempt to complete the survey because they are functionally illiterate. Ms. Kumar Dandillaya acknowledged the concerns, saying that the next step beyond this very general survey would be to better understand those issues. Within the health cluster, for instance, network meetings are being held to plan cross-departmental service integration pilots on particular topics.

#### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

- Suzan Pour-Sanae introduced herself as the contact responsible for social services policy for Service Employees International Union local 721, coordinating efforts across Los Angeles, Ventura, Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Riverside, and Orange counties on behalf of social workers and other DCFS employees. The union is working with county agencies on computer systems issues, especially around eligibility for social service programs, joining in the work group mandated by the Board of Supervisors that includes the Department of Public Social Services and community organizations. Members are collaborating on a system to be implemented five years from now, and have helped win state funding for the procurement process, which would otherwise have been delayed another two years.
- Roberta Javier introduced herself as a former foster youth and one of the 'survivors,' as she put it, of the MacLaren Children's Center. Prior to the permanent repurposing of the former MacLaren facility, now being used as office and training space, she urged recognition of those individuals who underwent such trauma there when it was a county shelter. She also asked for help in locating her DCFS records and those of at least 45 other people who have been told by County Counsel that their records were either destroyed or cannot be found.

According to Susan Jakubowski, Los Angeles County keeps records longer than any other county, and many states inappropriately purge records after only four or five years. DCFS records are often available for open cases as far back as 1982, and almost always for open cases from 1985 onward (though hard copies for those nearly 875,000 referrals have not been kept, as storage would be impossible). Katie Fesler from County Counsel suggested that former MacLaren residents request their case files from the juvenile court, since information from DCFS would be included there.

Referring to the need for Spanish-speaking DCFS staff, Ms. Javier, also president of a social work students' association at Cal State Los Angeles, knows of at least three bilingual students who took other jobs rather than wait through the county's lengthy response process following their initial applications.

**MEETING ADJOURNED**